Applications: Fitting yourself to the form

Many jobs require jobseekers to complete an application instead of submitting a résumé. But an application is a résumé in disguise: Its purpose is to show your qualifications. Assembling the following information about yourself in advance will make it easier to complete applications:

***• Identification.*** Be prepared to give your name, address, phone number, and Social Security number. You may also need to bring proof of identification when you pick up and drop off the application.

***• Employment history.*** List the month and year you started and ended each job; your supervisor’s name, address, and phone number; your job title, location, salary, and major duties; and your reason for leaving.

***• Education and certification.*** Know the name and city of the school you attended and the year you received your degree and the name, level, and award and renewal dates of certification.

***• Special skills.*** List any special skills you have that are closely related to the job, such as computer applications, or equipment operation.

***• References.*** Provide the names, phone numbers, and addresses of three or four people who have agreed to recommend you.

When you pick up an application, don’t miss an opportunity to make a good first impression. Dress as you would for the job. Politely request two copies of the form, or make your own copies of the original before you start filling it out. Read the entire application before you begin. Then, use one copy as a rough draft and the other as the final product. Write neatly with black ink.

Answer every question on the application. Write “not applicable” or “none” if a question does not apply to you. Some reviewers suggest answering “will discuss in interview” if asked for information that might disqualify you.

Make a copy of your completed application. If you go back for an interview, take this record with you. Having a completed form will also make it easier to fill out the next one.

Although forms do not offer the same flexibility as a résumé, you can still find ways to highlight your best qualifications. For example, you can use strong action verbs to describe your duties. If you do not have paid experience, you can give job titles to your volunteer work or list relevant academic experience, substituting student for job titles.

***Computer applications***. If you are filling out an application for a computer database, you will want to use keywords and simple formatting. Put the most important information first. Include as much information as you can for each question without becoming wordy or repetitive. The more relevant details you provide, the better your chances of using a keyword that matches an employer’s requirements. Before submitting the form, copy and paste your answers into a word-processing program so you can check the spelling.